The recession decimated the architecture profession, with firms closing or laying off large numbers of employees, architects left jobless for months or years, and many leaving the profession entirely. But a survey recently conducted by McGraw-Hill Construction (Record’s parent company) came to the counterintuitive conclusion that some U.S. firms expect a shortage of qualified designers to meet their workloads by 2014.

The survey of 1,007 U.S. designers found that nearly one-quarter of respondents anticipated a shortage of architects resulting from a combination of designers exiting the profession, baby boomers retiring, a lack of skills among architects looking for work, and less talent in the pipeline as job prospects discourage students from entering the field. Firms both large (more than 50 employees) and small (less than 10) anticipated some kind of shortage of designers, but nearly half of respondents from larger firms expect it to be severe.

A parallel survey of 448 American Institute of Architects members found that of the 15 percent of respondents who reported being laid off during the recession and its immediate aftermath, 15 percent of that group have moved on to other industries. At the same time, 60 percent of professionals surveyed anticipated a loss of knowledge resulting from older architects retiring. Of particular concern was a lack of workers with skills related to sustainable design—a rapidly growing segment of the industry. Fifty-six percent of firms surveyed reported difficulty finding employees with adequate green skills, and that number jumps to 72 percent for small firms. “Firms must be able to attract talent over a wide range of experience, while appealing to younger workers who are strongly motivated by environmental issues,” said Harvey M. Bernstein, vice president of industry insight and alliances for McGraw-Hill Construction, in a statement about the study.

But those young workers might not be the ones who are being hired. The survey of AIA members found that 94 percent thought that the economy would make it difficult for architecture students to find work, “a factor that surely influences whether to pursue a career in architecture,” said Bernstein, adding that 76 percent of students included in the study expressed an interest in working abroad, where many believed there would be more opportunities. “Architecture firms need to think strategically,” said Bernstein. “Not only about how to draw talented professionals to their firms, but also about how they will attract more architects to the profession.”

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